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Restoring Right Relationships: Restorative Justice and Post-Conflict States

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A view has developed among peace and conflict scholars that peace cannot persist in post-conflict societies without also establishing justice. This means peace scholars and practitioners need to think about justice and use a conception of justice to guide their peacemaking actions. However, even though most people have an intuitive assumption that "justice" is an obvious and commonly understood concept, there are conflicting conceptions of justice. Many adopt a Kantian position on justice and assume it is synonymous with retribution. However, retribution is not the only conception of justice. In this project, I argue that the conception of retributive justice is an incomplete conception of justice to look to when seeking peace in post-conflict societies. The more appropriate way to conceptualize justice is as the restoration of right relationships. This conception of justice is known as restorative justice, and in it forgiveness, apology, truth, and punishment work together to promote reconciliation and restore the relationships among the members of the conflict. Because restorative justice restores the broken relationships that cause violence, it is better at achieving a just peace than purely retributive justice and is the more appropriate conception of justice to apply to post-conflict states.

Information about the Author:

This project was completed as an honors thesis in Prof. David Western's Justice Seminar in Christ College. As a political science major interested in international criminal justice, Danielle Mueller is interested in how the theoretical basis for different conceptions of justice affect how justice is carried out in post-conflict states as well as how these conceptions of justice promote peace.

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